MIND CONTROL

The History of Subliminal Messages

http://websites.umich.edu/~onebook/pages/frames/historySet.html

Mind Control: The Root of Subliminal Messages

Subliminal messages are linked to the idea of mind control, and the roots of this are placed very far back in our history. Mind control is where an individual or group of individuals can be controlled without their awareness. It is perception below the threshold of the individual or group (Key, "The Age of Manipulation"). The implementation of mind control techniques brought about the idea that people can be made to do things they would not ordinarily do.

Since at least the 5th century B.C., the early Greeks used the science of rhetoric as a way of influencing people ("The Age of Manipulation"). By infusing pieces of mind-persuading data into sentences, people can manipulate others by the language they use. If a person sees or hears certain bits of information (i.e. words, fragments, or sentences) placed strategically, they can be persuaded one way or another (without perhaps knowing). Based on experimental findings in social psychology and the way in which we process information, the effectiveness of subliminal perception has been continually examined throughout history. Subliminal messaging and mind control persists to be under scrutiny--whether it is capable of doing what it intends to do to the targeted person.

1920's Radio

We have reason to believe that subliminal messaging is effective based on findings in historical contexts. An example of auditory subliminal messaging dates back to the 1920s when the BBC began broadcasting on radio for the first time. The people of the era thought the radio was so sinister, they considered it to be the voice of the devil. The BBC wanted to change this attitude, so they placed certain phrases using backward masking in their jingles. This may be an example of subliminal messages being used to persuade an entire nation to respond in a way they would not normally respond. A radio jingle was aired, which sounded completely innocent, but when played backwards it reveals a different purpose. The words, "this is not a noose, no really its not," can clearly be heard (from "Subliminal Messages and Backmasking"). The BBC believed the subconscious could pick up backward messages in ordinary speech. The BBC is obviously still around today, so perhaps this jingle actually did serve its deeper purpose!

At the Movies

Research on the subject dates back to the late 1800's. Public concern about subliminal manipulation can be seen in 1957 when a marketing researcher looked into statistical data. James Vicary claimed to have found dramatic increases in the sales of Coca-Cola and popcorn when he flashed the phrases "Drink Coca-Cola" and "Eat popcorn" for 1/2000 of a second during a movie. The statistics showed an increase in popcorn sales by 58% and an 18% increase in Coca-Cola sales. This is the shocking information that led to an enormous response from the public. Individuals as well as legislators imagined possible effects of subliminal perception on the future--a world where everyone was subliminally manipulated to do what perhaps the government wanted them to do. In reality though, research on the effects of subliminal messages has shown little overall effects in controlled conditions. There is no evidence based in real-world settings done by top researchers on influencing behavior. Also, in 1962, Vicary stated that the study was a fabrication and the evidence now suggests it was. He never released a detailed description of his study and there was never any independent evidence to support what he claimed (Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders*)

Gov't Interest

Throughout history, we have looked to political and governmental institutions to examine whether mind control and subliminal perception has been used amongst the general public. The CIA, form example, is one branch of government thought to use this technique in order to gain its authority over large bodies of people.

The U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) received complaints of a television station using subliminal messages in 1974. This was the first new case since the original in the 1950's. The FCC responded by issuing a public notice, which stated their official position:"We believe that the use of subliminal perception is inconsistent with the obligations of a [broadcast] licensee, and therefore we take this occasion to make clear that broadcasts employing such techniques are contrary to the public interest. Whether effective or not, such broadcasts clearly are intended to be deceptive" (see the legal issues of this site for the FCC's updated statement).

Studies

In the 1970s, controlled studies were conducted by the British psychologist Anthony Marcel. The experiments were based on previous findings indicating that a decision regarding a stimulus is "primed" when the stimulus follows a related stimulus. An experiment using an observer asked to classify a letter string as either a word (*juice*, *lawyer*) or a non-word (*eciuj*, *reywal*) was used. A letter string such as the word lawyer will be classified as a word faster when it follows a semantically related word (*judge*) than when it follows a non-related word (*juice*). Marcel found words that primed subsequent conditions made it difficult, if not impossible for the observers to distinguish when the words were present from when the words were absent. There have been many other experiments and studies done since Marcel's time to confirm his findings, but they have used other stimuli as well (such as pictures, faces, and spoken words). These other stimuli do prime or facilitate the following decisions when they are presented in an atmosphere that makes it hard to distinguish one stimulus from another stimulus. The belief is that the substantial information is perceived even when observers have little or no awareness of perceiving as shown by their difficulty in discriminating one stimulus from another stimulus.

1979-2001

In 1979 there were subliminal anti-theft messages from the music of Musak. It was shown to decrease theft (internal inventory shrinkage as well) by 37%. Now, whether this was actually due to the words in the music or to other sources no one can be sure (*Subliminal Messages and Backmasking*).

In recent years, the term *subliminal perception* has been made more general to describe any situation in which unnoticed stimuli are perceived. Subliminal messages can be seen in our advertisements if we look hard enough. Does this mean we are really influenced by subliminal messages? Do we buy certain cars because the rhetoric used enhances our desire to? Do we buy products because the ad in a magazine persuades us underneath our threshold of perception? Do we drink certain brands of soda because of product placement in movies that we perhaps do not notice? Do we recycle because the cast members in primetime television do, but we do not consciously see this while tuning in? These are questions to ponder while searching through our web site of Subliminal Messages.

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